

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7178
INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
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AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 09311

E.O.:11652:GDS
TAGS: PEPR, LE, EG, SY, PLO
SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN PRESS ATTACKS ON ASSAD

REF: (A) STATE 77596, (B) DAMASCUS 1667

1. DURING MY VISIT TODAY WITH SADAT (VICE PRESIDENT MUBARAK AND FONMIN KAMAL ALSO PRESENT) SADAT SAID HE WISHED TO REITERATE HIS ADMIRATION AND APPRECIATION FOR PRESIDENT CARTER'S INITIATIVE IN OBTAINING UNSC RESOLUTION ON ISRAEL WITHDRAWAL FROM SOUTH LEBANON AND ESTABLISHING UNIFIL. HE WAS CONFIDENT THAT THE REPERCUSSIONS OF THIS ACTION WILL SOONER OR LATER BE FELT ON ALL FRONTS.

2. THIS GAVE ME PEG ON WHICH TO HANG AN APPEAL THAT GOE MEDIA TONE DOWN ITS ATTACKS ON SYRIA. I NOTED SYRIANS HAD BEHAVED WELL IN PAST WEEK AND THAT
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SYRIAN REPRESENTATIVE IN NEW YORK HAD WORKED CLOSELY WITH ABDUL MEGUID DURING UNSC DISCUSSIONS LEADING TO RESOLUTIONS 425 AND 426. I ALSO NOTED SYRIAN STOPPAGE OF FURTHER IRAQI REINFORCEMENTS TO SOUTH LEBANON. SYRIAN COOPERATION WILL BE IMPORTANT IF UNIFIL IS TO EXERCISE ITS MANDATE EFFECTIVELY, WHICH IN TURN WILL FACILITATE RAPID ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL. WEAK LEBANESE

GOVERNMENT NEEDS HELP IN THIS DIFFICULT PERIOD AND ONLY SYRIA CAN GIVE IT. TOLD HIM WE ARE CONCERNED THAT SYRIANS MAY BE LESS WILLING COOPERATE IF THEY ARE PUBLICLY CRITICIZED BY MODERATE ARAB STATES AS WELL AS BY REJECTIONISTS AND RADICALS SUCH AS LIBYANS AND IRAQIS.

3. SADAT'S REPLY WAS PREDICTABLE. IT WAS SYRIANS WHO STARTED PRESS ATTACKS ON EGYPT AND THESE ARE CONTINUING. IF SYRIANS STOP THEIR ATTACKS ON EGYPT, WE AND THEY WILL FIND EGYPT WILL ALSO STOP. HE AGREED THAT SYRIAN COOPERATION WITH UNIFIL IS NECESSARY, BUT CONTENDED THAT WE NEED NOT BE CONCERNED THAT ASSAD WILL DO ANYTHING THAT WOULD RISK BRINGING SYRIA INTO CONFLICT WITH THE ISRAELIS. HE KNEW ASSAD BETTER THAN WE DO. IT IS IN ASSAD'S OWN INTEREST TO COOPERATE AND, WHILE EGYPTIAN PRESS ATTACKS DOUBTLESS STUNG (AS THEY WERE INTENDED TO DO), HE WAS SURE THAT SUCH ATTACKS WOULD NOT SWAY ASSAD FROM RATIONAL ACTIONS.

4. I SAID THAT WE KNEW SYRIANS HAD STARTED THE MEDIA ATTACKS AND THAT THESE ARE STILL CONTINUING, BUT SUGGESTED THAT IF EGYPT PUBLIC MEDIA RIPOSTES WERE NOW DISCONTINUED OR LOWERED, THIS MIGHT HAVE A SALUTARY EFFECT ON THE SYRIANS. SADAT SAID HE DOUBTED THIS. IT WOULD ONLY CAUSE THE SYRIANS TO BELIEVE THAT THEY

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HAD WON THE PROPAGANDA BATTLE. WHILE HE WOULD CONSIDER OUR VIEWS, HIS ASSESSMENT OF LIKELY SYRIAN REACTION TO ARAB PUBLIC MEDIA ATTACKS WAS SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT FROM OURS. HE REITERATED THAT IF SYRIA STOPS ITS PRESS ATTACKS ON EGYPT, GOE IS PREPARED AT ONCE TO RECIPROCATATE.

5. COMMENT: WE HAVE BEEN THROUGH THIS KIND OF EXERCISE BEFORE WITH THE SAME RESULTS. IF WE SERIOUSLY BELIEVE THAT EGYPTIAN PRESS ATTACKS WILL INFLUENCE ASSAD'S BEHAVIOR IN LEBANON, AND WOULD LIKE TO STOP SUCH EGYPTIAN ATTACKS, THE SIMPLEST WAY TO DO SO IS TO URGE THE SYRIANS TO STOP THEIR ATTACKS. IF THEY DO, THEY WILL QUICKLY FIND THAT THE EGYPTIANS DO LIKEWISE. BUT SADAT, WHOSE BASIC OBJECTIVE CONTINUES TO BE TO GET THE SYRIANS OUT OF LEBANON, IS NOT LIKELY TO LEAVE THE PUBLIC MEDIA BATTLEFIELD EXCLUSIVELY TO THE SYRIANS. WHAT IS MORE, PUSHING THIS ISSUE TOO STRONGLY IS LIKELY TO AROUSE OLD EGYPTIAN SUSPICIONS OF USG PARTIALITY TOWARD ASSAD AND SYRIA. EILTS

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